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VU4—Andaman & Nicobar Islands 2004

excerpted and adapted from an article by Mrs. D. Bharathi Prasad, VU2RBI, Chief Coordinator, NIAR

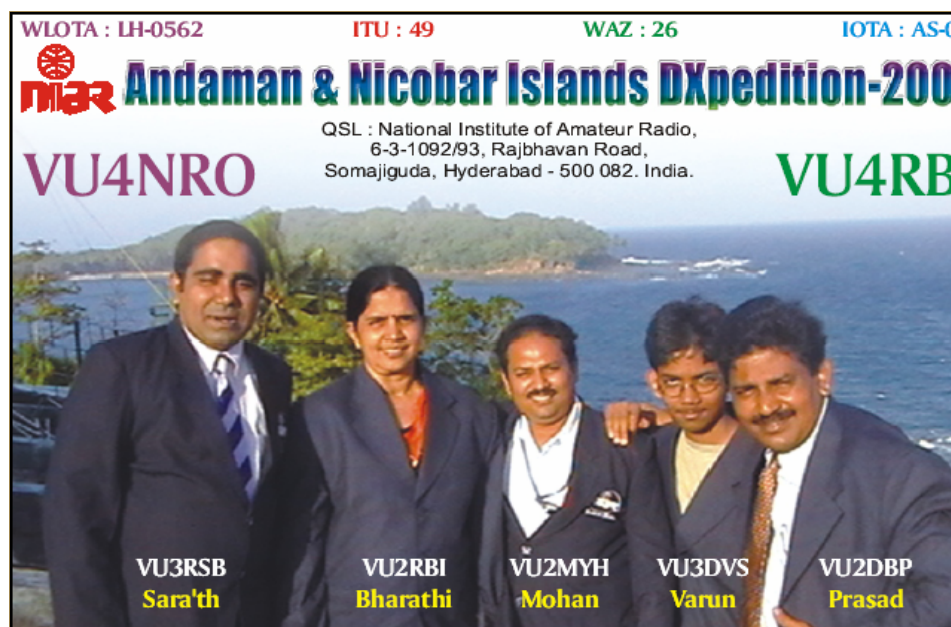
A DXpedition is a radio sport activity for ham radio operators worldwide. Hams conduct expeditions to various islands and countries with an aim to contact distant countries. Operations during these expeditions help with the study of propagation and research in wireless activity. They also allow hams to reach out to millions of people across the globe by establishing direct radio contact with as many people as possible which in turn promotes international understanding.

The Department of Telecommunications and Ministry of Information & Technology, Government of India, permitted a team of five operators to conduct an Andaman & Nicobar Islands DXpedition from December 3-31, 2004, with the special callsigns of VU4RBI and VU4NRO.

The team, under my leadership, consisted of

- D. N. Prasad, VU2DBP;
- S. Ram Mohan, VU2MYH;
- R. Sarath Babu, VU3RSB;
- and D. S. Varun Sastry, VU3DVS, who was 15 yrs. old and the youngest of all.

The DXpedition was sponsored by the National Institute of Amateur Radio (NIAR), an NGO with head-



Cover of QSL card for the Andaman & Nicobar Islands DXpedition—2004

quarters in Hyderabad, and the Ministry of Information & Technology, Government of India.

The DXpedition was formally inaugurated by the Honorable Governor of Andhra Pradesh on 25 November 2004. Team members met in the headquarters of NIAR to select the needed equipment before proceeding to Port Blair. The 500 kg of equipment was comprised of high frequency transceivers, Yagi antennas, vertical antennas, dipole anten-

nas, masts, amplifiers, etc.

Three members including me proceeded by air and reached Port Blair on 1 December 2004. The rest of the members and other technical assistants of NIAR came by ship from Chennai on December 2nd.

On reaching Port Blair we met the local authorities who extended complete support to the team. One station was erected in the Govt. Polytechnic College; the second on the

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Newsletter Update

Meet Mike, K4YL

Andaman & Nicobar Islands.....from page 1



Stealing a moment to greet the camera

hotel premises where some members were accommodated; and the third in the Science Centre.

In addition to the support extended by the local administration, the officers of the Army Signals Unit of Port Blair also extended their cooperation by sparing the technical manpower to help erect antennas and assist with local logistics.

The team operated PSK, CW, and SSB on frequencies that were in accordance with Indian rules and regulations.

It was a pleasure to talk with hundreds and hundreds of radio amateurs around the globe while controlling the pileup each day of the expedition. Sometimes it was difficult to catch-up with low power operators because high power operators hijacked the situation; however, I took every care to exchange reports with low power operators including mobile operators.

I operated the radio from the early hours of December 12th to the early hours of December 26th with hardly three to four hours of sleep a day. I made about 23,000 contacts with almost all countries and, including the other team members, we made a total of about 35,000 contacts before the earthquake and associated tsunami struck our location in the wee hours of December 26th.

Tremors and tsunami

In the early hours of December 26th while other hotel guests were fast asleep, I was continuing my DXing with the usual spirit. I was talking to

an Indonesian ham when all of a sudden I felt tremors at around 6:29 a.m. I realized it to be an earthquake and shouted "tremors" into the microphone. I rushed out of the room raising alarm and alerting others. All the occupants of the rooms rushed out and gathered on the lawns of the hotel building. Immediately after the tremors, my team members rushed from their shacks to my hotel and by



Bharathi, VU4RBI, provides emergency communications during tsunami disaster

God's grace we were all safe! After about half an hour, I went back to the radio shack and checked for the antenna on the rooftop. It was disturbed by the tremors and needed to be re-erected. There was no power so the hotel management put on the generator. Immediately, I went on the air and contacted hams from Thailand (HS0ZAA, Mr. John) and the mainland of India (VU2UU, Mr. Shanker from Chennai; and, VU2MYL, Mrs. Rama from Hyderabad) who confirmed the tremors in their locations as well. I could guess the magnitude of the damage due to the earthquake and decided to suspend the DXpedition operations and begin emergency communications with the mainland (VU) and other people by turning the beam toward the mainland.

The telephone lines went out of order and within a few hours we

learned the extent of damage from the local people. While the news of death and devastation in other parts of India was quickly transmitted around the world, the situation in Andaman and Nicobar Islands was not known. I went on broadcasting information about the situation to anyone who could hear my signals. Simultaneously, I sent my team members to the office of the Chief Secretary, Government of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, to express our willingness to help the administration by establishing emergency communications. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) requested our services on December 27th and we immediately established a radio station, operated by me and VU3RSB, in the control room of the DC's office. At the request of the DC, two of our team members, VU2MYH and VU2DVO, proceeded to Car Nicobar Island on a military aircraft and established communication between Port Blair & Nicobar.

Humanitarian Communications

Because of the collapsed infrastructure, we handled hundreds of messages each day from the mainland and affected areas and due to the collapsed communication infrastructure ours was the only link for thousands of Indians and other country people who were worried about their

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A structure in Port Blair

friends and families in the islands. Also, our station in the control room became the centre of messages between Port Blair & Nicobar Island. Survivors in Car Nicobar were communicating with their relatives in Port Blair through our stations. Other hams of the country located on the mainland helped us relay the messages whenever there was skip between our stations in the islands. When telephone lines were restored on Tuesday, December 28th, the information received on the radio about the survivors from Car Nicobar was conveyed to their anxious relatives on the mainland.

We also helped about 15 foreign tourists, including several from the US, send news to their families. On the request of the DC, one of our team members, VU2JOS, was sent to Huiday Island along with other government officials for relief activity.

The common man was totally happy to utilize our service and the magnitude of their satisfaction on receiving information about the welfare of their kith and kin is beyond one's imagination.

We dared not sleep inside the hotel rooms at night so we slept in the open air on the hotel lawns. Following the tsunami, tremors continued during the remaining six days of my stay and even afterwards.

Mr. Charles Harpole, K4VUD, from the USA, and Mr. Henry from Sweden visited our shack during the DXpedition. Also, Mr. Charles observed our handling of emergency

traffic on December 26th and left for Thailand on December 27th.

I continued emergency communications until the forenoon of 1 January 2005, the day of my return to Delhi; however, my team members continued in Port Blair, Nicobar, and Huiday Islands. A few more from the NIAR proceeded on January 2nd to other islands which had no other means of communication.

Though we went to Andaman & Nicobar Islands for a DXpedition, the circumstances leading us to conduct emergency communications were sheer coincidence. The representatives of different media agencies including the Associated Press, Washington Post, Zee News, etc., witnessed our service to society through amateur radio in its hour of need and acknowledged the same. I am also thankful to them for spreading awareness amongst the public



Tsunami destruction

about amateur radio communication. The potential of amateur radio communication to bring people together has been established once again.

I am proud of my team who extended all the support for the operations during the period of my stay in Port Blair. I left Port Blair with a heavy heart for the departed souls.

I am also thankful to the Government of India for permitting me to conduct the DXpedition and particularly the authorities of the Ministry of Information and Technology and the National Institute of Amateur Radio

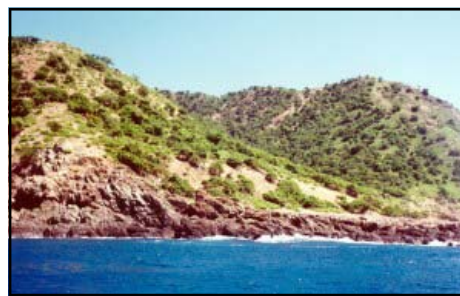
for sponsoring the DXpedition.

I am also thankful to fellow hams worldwide who made the DXpedition successful through their individual efforts and those who helped by conducting emergency traffic.

(Photos courtesy of Frank Rosenkranz, DL4KQ)

Navassa & Desecheo KP1/5 Project

from Mike Thomas, NA5U



"Rugged hills of Desecheo Island"
(photo: www.oceans-unlimited.com)

The KP1/5 Project Team, in conjunction with the Lone Star DX Association, is sponsoring an effort to gain access to Navassa and Desecheo Islands.

A bill, H.R. 298, has been introduced that would require the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to allow public access to the islands. Passage of this bill would open the door to amateur radio DXpeditions.

A briefing will be held on Capitol Hill on April 8th so to ensure passage of this bill the KP1/5 Project Team asks that you contact your representative as soon as possible and ask him/her to co-sponsor the bill and support H.R. 298. A sample letter to legislators, news updates, and information can be found at <<http://www.KP1-5.com>>.

For further information, contact Mike Thomas <na5u@kp1-5.com>.

Meet Mike, K4YL!

You might know INDEXA member Mike, K4YL, as Stephen Mike Grose. Mike enjoys DXing, County Hunting, and Contesting and when he's not on the air, he's busy responding to QSL requests for the many—too many to mention—DX stations he manages. With each QSL card this loyal INDEXA member includes an INDEXA membership application. Thanks, Mike!

If you haven't met Mike, you will. Mike will be the QSL manager for the forthcoming Peter I Island DXpedition.



Mike, K4YL, with faithful companion, "Dutchess"

Next issue: A visit with A52CDX, Bhutan 2004, and W6YOO

Newsletter Update

In this age of technology, information comes at us fast and furious. On occasion, "breaking news" is old news by the time you receive the INDEXA newsletter in your snail mail receptacle.

To keep you up-to-date, the newsletter staff will provide e-bulletins whenever pertinent DX information becomes available to us.

If you haven't signed-up for the e-newsletter, contact Bill Jennings, W4UNP, by e-mail at <w4unp@comporium.net>.

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